

FRS Industries



Owners: Dale & Sheri Larson
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Founded: 1885



One of North Dakota's oldest businesses has new owners with dreams for the future. Fargo Rubber Stamp Works was founded in 1885 by George Brown, a newspaper printer. After he sold it around 1922, it became a family-owned business for many years. The company relocated to its present site at 64 N. 4th Street in Fargo in 1966.

Around that time, Dale Larson's mom worked for the business. In 1990, his wife went to work there. Recently, the owners decided to retire and offered to sell FRS Industries to the Larson's. Dale says, "I didn't know where to turn. I went to the bank that the company was using. Pam Orth at Alerus Financial in Fargo gave me a card and flier about the Small Business Development Center. I visited with Donovan Wadholm with Fargo SBDC and he helped me with the projections and business plan that the agency requires. He helped us work through many scenarios. Pam and Donovan recommended attorneys and other people who could help me set up the company. They were real instrumental in connecting me to the right people."

Dale was coming into a whole new industry, but his wife, Sheri, had experience at FRS, so learning the manufacturing process came easily. The company makes rubber stamps, engraved goods, award ribbons, and advertising specialties, then resells them to other businesses and individuals. Their biggest selling item is award ribbons and rosettes sold to schools, fairs, horse shows, and other events nationwide. Rubber stamps are the second biggest seller, though self-inkers have replaced most traditional stamps. FRS Industries also does apparel, buttons, signs, medals, sashes, badges and clocks. Dale says he likes the personal satisfaction he gets coming to work each morning. "A lot of raw materials come in here and it's nice to see the finished product."

Becoming business owners hasn't changed the Larson's lifestyle much. But their kids were surprised when they told them about their plans. "We sprung this on them and they were kind of in awe that we decided to do this. Both of them (ages 15 and 20) have worked for us during the summer, but it's too soon to tell if FRS will be passed on in our family. Our daughter is going to college to be a nurse and our son has lots of big ideas!

Dale and Sheri's dream is to grow the business by finding more customers, increasing sales and updating their product offerings. FRS exhibits at national trade shows and does some business online at www.frsind.com. There are about 15,000 companies in our data base, with 600-700 active accounts this month, and 35 mostly fulltime employees. "We put everything we had into this, so it was a huge risk, financially. But if we continue as we are, the benefits will be phenomenal."

FRS Industries opened under the Larson's leadership in January 2007. They planned for a seamless transition so customers and staff wouldn't notice the business had changed hands. Dale says, "We want everything to continue as is; our customers shouldn't notice much of a change. We want to make sure it's the same FRS they have been dealing with for years. It's fun working for a company that has a good history. We tell customers that FRS now stands for Fast, Reliable Service!"

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